

Sermon – 23-1-11 – FaithWorks – Isaiah 9:1-4, Matthew 4:12-23, St. Andrew

*‘Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.’*

There are Peter and Andrew, James and John, doing what was expected of them – working in the family business – and they just get up and leave.

They didn’t even think twice – they just got up and left.

I sometimes don’t think we realize how **huge** that is.

They leave **everything** – their trade – their whole source of income.

James and John even leave their **father**.

In a patriarchal society, the father-son relationship is one of the most intimate bonds.

It suggests family responsibilities as well as the family business.

In a culture where loyalty was first to the **family** and where there was the expectancy that the sons would carry on the family business to take care of their parents, this was nothing short of abandonment.

These disciples had to make a **choice** – they had to decide what was most important – following the societal expectations or following Jesus.

You may know the story of Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma.

When she married Michael Aris, she told him that even though she was pledging her life to him, if her country needed her, she would have to go and this was long before they called on her to lead them in the democratic movement.

When her children were young boys the call came and she left everything – her husband, her children – her whole life and followed the call.

Even when the government tortured her by refusing entry to her husband who was dying of prostate cancer she stood by her obligation to her country.

That was her priority. That was her call.

In our society we would see that as **abandonment** yet that was exactly what the **disciples** did that day Jesus called them to follow him.

I thank God that I have never been called to make such a move.

I thank God that I don't live in a country that would persecute me for my faith.

I thank God that I do not have to make such drastic choices about **my** priorities.

However I am, and we all are, called to be true to our beliefs and our baptismal vows and that often means thinking beyond the box and taking a leap of faith.

As Christians, we are called to **risk** and in a society which constantly talks of security, this is indeed countercultural.

But as Christians, we also are called to examine our priorities, to think outside the box – to make a leap of faith and take risks.

It is all about where we, as believers, sense God is calling us.

The call story we heard today is like every other call story.

It begins with an unexpected invitation, and ends with a risky decision.

Like every call story it begins with **God's** initiative, and ends with men and women who are willing to take a chance.

Jesus invites them with simple, direct, forceful words: "***Follow me.***"

**Their response is immediate and total.**

These men are called from their previous lives of fishing to new lives of teaching and healing.

Their response to the call of discipleship may appear to be quite radical.

Actually, very few of us are asked to leave all behind and launch out into new lives and new ministerial responsibilities.

Most of us are expected to answer the call and remain where we are.

But we **are** all called to examine our **priorities**, to take risks and make a leap of faith.

We are, like those disciples, all called to **something**.

We are all called to **give up something** – whether that is our time, our money or in the case of ordained ministry our profession.

We are all called to follow Jesus **sacrificially** and to abandon **something**.

It is always difficult to ask people to **give up** anything and it seems in the church that is a constant struggle.

At this time of the year, we ask for **volunteers** to help out with the business of the parish over the next year.

We scour the parish list to see who can do what.

There is much to be done and we are aware that with very busy people **something** will have to be given up – something will have to be **abandoned** – to answer the call to service.

Sacrificially giving of our time is very difficult in a society where time is a very precious commodity.

Then there is the **money!**

In order to **do** God's work, we need financial backing – not just to maintain this building or keep St. Theodore's going but to also further God's work through the wider church.

In the Anglican Church, we are very nervous about asking for money.

Somehow we think the diocese or even the government will look after us.

At times, I think we should just **guilt** people by saying that biblically we are asked to **tithe**.

But I have to constantly remember that I am not begging for **myself** but merely asking others to examine their priorities and listen to where they are being called to sacrificially give.

Do we see **anything** whether it be **time or money** that we give to the church as **a gift** of something we are **entitled to keep** or do we see it as an **obligation** by virtue of our faith.

Do we listen to the **world** which tells us that what we have is **ours** or do we see it all as **God's** gift to **us**?

Over the next little while you will be asked to give of either your time or your money or perhaps both.

I implore you to listen not to the words you hear from **us** but to **God's** call.

I was reading recently about an advertisement for cellular phone service that asked the question **“Can you hear me now?”**

It suggested that with **their** system, reception is good anywhere in the world—if you are open to the call.

This all sounds like a vocation ad—not merely vocation to **priesthood or religious life**, but vocation to a life of **Christian ministry**.

God says to all of us, **“Can you hear me now?”**

We can hear this call anywhere in the world, **if** we are open to it.

So be open to that call.

Look at your **priorities**

What is God calling **you** to?

What would **you be** unwilling to give up if Jesus asked you to follow him?"

We are **all** called to belief.

We are all called to **service**.

We are all called to examine our **priorities**.

**We are all called to follow Jesus.**

All we have to do is **listen, be open to the call** and then **immediately** follow through.

Remember those disciples and their sacrifice and how they:

*'Immediately left the boat and their father, and followed him.'*